

Natural Resources Element

Introduction

Amesbury is very rich in natural resources, including valuable amenities found in the Merrimack and the Powow Rivers, Woodsom Farm, Cider Hill, Lake Attitash and Lake Gardner, in addition to the newly acquired Camp Kent Environmental Center, a lakeside educational facility with an environmental focus. These resources provide Amesbury's citizens with a high quality of life through open space for passive and active recreational activities as well as educational programs. The natural resources also provide the community with clean water, clean air, and flood protection. Development in Amesbury in recent years has threatened the natural resources and open space, but protection is attainable through a cohesive preservation plan.

The Land Use Element section of the Master Plan discusses Amesbury's development patterns, undeveloped land including natural resources and recreational areas, the downtown, and residential neighborhoods. This section focuses on the open space, recreation and natural resource areas within Amesbury. Given that different sources of available data were used to document existing conditions in Amesbury, open space and recreation areas will be defined as they are in the Draft Town of Amesbury Open Space & Recreation Plan Update 2002-2006 (OSRP Update), and not as defined by terms listed in the Land Use Element's Land Use Code Definitions.

Community Planning

In recent years, Amesbury has identified needs and priorities for open space through a series of household surveys, public workshops, planning studies and documents, and coordination between citizen groups and Amesbury officials. Such efforts have led to a significant awareness of the value that natural resources provide to the community, and the importance of taking active measures to protect these areas.



Citizen Survey and Visioning Sessions

- A Citizen Survey was mailed to 7,103 households in 2001, and approximately 17 percent of the surveys were returned. The survey addressed issues such as municipal services, quality of life, redevelopment projects, planning, and

demographics. A copy of the survey results is provided in the Appendix.

- Three public visioning sessions were held in the year 2000 to solicit citizen input on the future of the downtown area. The participants discussed elements such as Smart Growth, sprawl, development strategies, and improvements within the downtown area including the Central Business District and the Upper and Lower Millyards.



Woodsom Farm Studies and Planning Documents

- Woodsom Farm is the largest parcel of public land set aside for conservation and passive recreation. The Woodsom Farm Committee was appointed in 1998 to address open space planning and the Amesbury's recreational field needs. After a public hearing and a series of meetings, including meetings with organized user groups, the Committee produced the *Woodsom Farm Committee Recommendations, June 1999*.
- Other planning documents for Woodsom Farm include the *Background information/program for Woodsom farm athletic fields and fracture trace report*, the *Woodsom Farm Archeological Study 2002*, and the *Woodsom Farm DEM Homestead/Cowbarn Study*.

Camp Kent Planning Documents

- Amesbury purchased Camp Kent, a former Girl Scout camp on Lake Gardner, in 1998. Citizen groups assisted officials in developing the property as an environmental center. In the year 2000 Amesbury developed the *Camp Kent Trail and Cammett site plans*.
- Seekamp Environmental Consulting, Inc. prepared the *Camp Kent Ecological Evaluation and Management Recommendations* for Amesbury. The report documents Camp Kent's land use history, vegetation, soils, and wildlife and provides management recommendations for the site.
- Additional Camp Kent physical and resource documents have been produced by the property caretakers.



Municipal Planning Documents

- The Amesbury Historic Commission, the Office of Community and Economic Development and a planning consultant developed the *Preservation Plan for the Town of Amesbury* in 1999¹. Further discussion of the Preservation Plan can be found in the *Historic and Cultural Resources Element*.
- The Office of Community and Economic Development summarizes many of Amesbury's ongoing initiatives in their *Programs, Projects, & Planning Guide* written in 2002. The guide reviews 16 projects such as the Comprehensive Planning Zoning Updates and the Powow Riverwalk and Bikeway Project.
- The *Town of Amesbury Open Space and Recreation Plans* (1996-2000 and the 2002-2006 draft update) are comprehensive reports developed from the surveys, workshops, and planning documents listed above. The plan developed in 2002 is the primary open space planning document for Amesbury, and discusses the historical context of the community and documents and evaluates existing conditions. The report evaluates Amesbury's land conservation efforts, existing recreation facilities, additional community needs and contaminated land. The planning documents and public processes outlined above aided in establishing the *OSRP Update's* goals, objectives, and a Five Year Action Plan.

Summary of Resource Protection

Amesbury has worked to protect its natural resources through proactive zoning initiatives and land acquisition. The Town has modified some of its existing zoning districts to allow development along existing major roadways and limit development between the major roadways to protect and preserve key natural features. Amesbury adopted a Cluster Residential Special Permit, which encourages common open space, and the Neighborhood Conservation zoning district, which protects sensitive cultural, environmental, and historic resources. The rate of development bylaw limits the number of new houses that can be built during the year ensuring that housing growth occurs in an orderly manner and that adequate municipal services can be provided to support new and existing development.

One of the most popular resource protection initiatives the Town has undertaken was the 1989 purchase of 379 acres of agricultural land associated with the historic Woodsom Farm from private ownership. The land was purchased for municipal use and is protected as common open space associated with a nearby cluster development. The farm is currently used for passive recreation.



¹ Preservation Plan for the Town of Amesbury

The acquisition of Camp Kent in 1997 also added over 16 acres of land dedicated to education, recreation, and open space preservation to Amesbury's assets.

Parks, Natural Resources, and Conservation Land

According to the *OSRP Update*, Amesbury has approximately 572 acres of public parks including Woodsom Farm (379 acres), the Powow River Conservation District, the Town Forest, Deer Island, and many smaller parks. Amesbury's public parks are used for passive and active recreation such as bird watching, trail running, and cross-country skiing. Amesbury's two conservation reserves total approximately 34 acres, and privately owned parks and camps total 23 acres. The total land area for public and private conservation/passive recreation in Amesbury is approximately 629 acres². This number has increased since the 1996 open space report with the purchase of Camp Kent, a 16.5-acre former Girl Scout camp on Lake Gardner.

The Open Space and Natural Resources Inventory Map depict the environmental resources found in the Town. Amesbury's full Recreation/Open Space Inventory can be found in the table on pages 33 through 35 of the *OSRP Update* or in the Appendix. Table NR-1 summarizes the acreages of Amesbury's open space and recreation lands.

Table NR-1
Recreation/Open Space Inventory Summary

Designation	Total Acreage
Playfields	112.01
Parks	558.69
Small Parks	13.72
Conservation	33.82
Marinas	4.1
Cemeteries	125.95
Undeveloped	38.7
Privately Owned	5.85
Private Camps	17.5
Private Facilities	158.31
Total	1067.65

The larger sites on the Recreation/Open Space inventory are mapped on the Master Plan's Open Space and Natural Resources Map and are listed in Table NR-2.



² Discrepancy in open space/conservation land totals between the Open Space and Land Use elements may be a result of exclusion of cluster developments' dedicated green space.



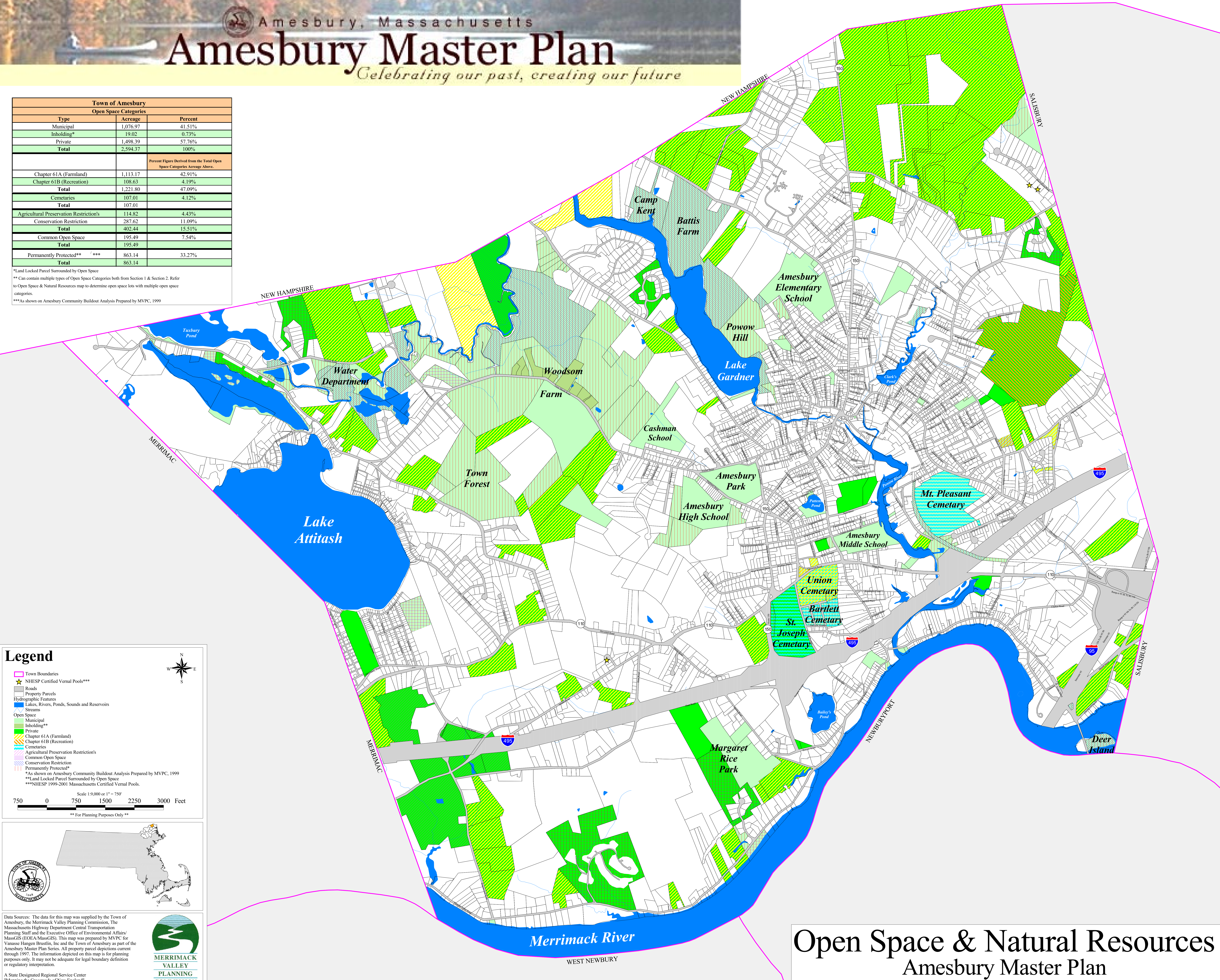
Amesbury, Massachusetts

Amesbury Master Plan

Celebrating our past, creating our future

Town of Amesbury		
Open Space Categories		
Type	Acreage	Percent
Municipal	1,076.97	41.51%
Inholding*	19.02	0.73%
Private	1,498.39	57.76%
Total	2,594.37	100%
Percent Figure Derived from the Total Open Space Categories Acreage Above.		
Chapter 61A (Farmland)	1,113.17	42.91%
Chapter 61B (Recreation)	108.63	4.19%
Total	1,221.80	47.09%
Cemeteries	107.01	4.12%
Total	107.01	
Agricultural Preservation Restriction/s	114.82	4.43%
Conservation Restriction	287.62	11.09%
Total	402.44	15.51%
Common Open Space	195.49	7.54%
Total	195.49	
Permanently Protected** / ***	863.14	33.27%
Total	863.14	

*Land Locked Parcel Surrounded by Open Space
** Can contain multiple types of Open Space Categories both from Section 1 & Section 2. Refer to Open Space & Natural Resources map to determine open space lots with multiple open space categories.
***As shown on Amesbury Community Buildout Analysis Prepared by MVPC, 1999



Legend

- Town Boundaries
- NHESP Certified Vernal Pools***
- Roads
- Property Parcels
- Hydrographic Features
 - Lakes, Rivers, Ponds, Sounds and Reservoirs
 - Streams
- Open Space
 - Municipal
 - Inholding**
 - Private
 - Chapter 61A (Farmland)
 - Chapter 61B (Recreation)
 - Cemeteries
 - Agricultural Preservation Restriction/s
 - Common Open Space
 - Conservation Restriction
 - Permanently Protected**

*As shown on Amesbury Community Buildout Analysis Prepared by MVPC, 1999
**Land Locked Parcel Surrounded by Open Space
***NHESP 1999-2001 Massachusetts Certified Vernal Pools.

Scale 1:9,000 or 1" = 750'
750 0 750 1500 2250 3000 Feet
** For Planning Purposes Only **

Data Sources: The data for this map was supplied by the Town of Amesbury, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, the Massachusetts Highway Department Central Transportation Planning Staff and the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs/ MassGIS (EOEA/MassGIS). This map was prepared by MVPC for Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. and the Town of Amesbury as part of the Amesbury Master Plan Series. All property parcel depictions current through 1997. The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. It may not be adequate for legal boundary definition or regulatory interpretation.

A State Designated Regional Service Center
"Mapping the Crossroads of New England"
Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC)
160 Main Street, Haverhill MA, 01830

Printed April 15 2003 LHM/MDP
Revised Feb. 24 2004 MDP

Open Space & Natural Resources Amesbury Master Plan

Table NR-2
Recreation/Open Space – Key Site Summary³

Site	Zoning	Acreage
Woodsom Farm	OSC	379
Town Forest	OSC	41
Deer Island	OSC	4.69
Town Park	OSC	23.4
Powow River Conservation District*	OSC/RC	134
Margaret Rice Park	OSC	31.9
Collins Street Park	OSC	1.8
Riverwalk	IC, R-8, C	1.1
Amesbury High School	OSC	NL
Amesbury Middle School	OSC	NL
Amesbury Elementary School	OSC	NL
Cashman Elementary School	OSC	NL
Total		

NL = not listed in *OSRP Update* table

* Including Battis Farm, Powow Hill, Batchelder Park, Camp Kent, and the Lake Gardner Beach

It should be noted that there are discrepancies in the OSRP Update for the combined acreages for these uses between the table on pages 33 through 35 and the summary on page 46. Future work on the inventory should include eliminating all discrepancies in the acreage totals and a coordinated mapping effort.

The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) and the Cooperative Extension Service standards suggest that 43 acres of recreational open space is needed per 1000 population. This standard encourages municipalities to enhance their quality of life through providing sufficient recreational areas and open space to meet community needs. Merrimack Valley Planning Commission estimates that the population of Amesbury will be 17,038 in 2005, which would require 733 acres of conservation/passive recreation land. As noted in the Housing Element of the Master Plan, the Metropolitan Area Planning Council projects Amesbury's population to be over 21,000 by 2025. This would require 903 acres of open space, or an addition of 331 acres to the 572 acres listed in the current inventory. Securing an adequate acreage of recreational open space for Amesbury's population will insure that the use remains at an appropriate level, as well as preserving the natural environment and limiting impacts to the land.

Protecting open space is an essential component in preserving and enhancing the quality of life for the residents of Amesbury. Land conservation guides growth to



3 Draft Town of Amesbury Open Space & Recreation Plan 2002-2006 Update (pages 33-35)

appropriate areas away from sensitive natural resource areas. Much of Amesbury's open space is lacking protection through conservation measures such as zoning, acquisition, and deed restrictions. In order to preserve the existing open space from development, the Five Year Action Plan includes developing a policy statement on open space protection.

Amesbury must identify parcels to be preserved, prioritize these parcels, and identify possible ways to acquire preservation rights. Adopting a formal policy on the preservation of community open space will further clarify the Town's goals. This can be supplemented with a program of public awareness and education towards the needs and benefits of conservation and preservation of open space. Farm owners and land owners with large parcels should be identified and encouraged to be key participants in the educational process.



Woodsom Farm

Woodsom Farm is considered one of Amesbury's historical assets with a large dairy barn and 1840's residence. George Jewell Woodsom constructed the house and barn on the property circa 1840, and the property became Essex County's largest dairy farm. The farm was purchased by the Town of Amesbury and is no longer used for farming, but the landscape maintains an agricultural image.

Woodsom Farm has been at the forefront of open space planning in recent years because of its expansive size and proximity to the Cashman Elementary School and Amesbury High School. The *Woodsom Farm Committee's Recommendation to the Amesbury Municipal Council* (published in June 1999) concluded that recreational playfields should be constructed at Woodsom farm. Their conclusion was based on surveys and interviews with 29 organized user groups and individuals including the Amesbury School Department. Anticipated demand for fields was calculated from existing use data and a growth projection. The proposed project consisted of four rectangular playfields and two baseball/softball diamonds.

The Mayor formed an Implementation Committee to take the project through the permitting process. The Conservation Commission and the Municipal Government approved the project, but suits and appeals delayed and altered the scope of the project. The revised proposal for three rectangular fields and one diamond will go before the Planning Board. The Department of Environmental Protection action will be stayed until the completion of the Planning Board Hearings and its action on the proposal.

The Woodsom Farm Committee determined that a covered picnic and activity area and a restroom facility are needed at the farm. Other general recommendations in the Woodsom Farm Committee's report include:

- *Providing for broad based use of the farm;*
- *Protecting the wetlands;*
- *Maintaining historic significance;*
- *Addressing maintenance needs;*
- *Preserving the scenic corridor;*
- *Providing for a demonstrated need; and*
- *Preserving open space;*
- *Reducing long term impact/sustainability.*



Camp Kent

The Town of Amesbury purchased Camp Kent from the Spar & Spindle Girl Scout Council with an urban self help grant in 1997. The 16.5 acres of fields, wetlands, and forest is located off South Hampton Road in the northwestern section of Amesbury, and is adjacent to approximately 120 acres of public conservation land. Camp Kent, along with Battis Farm, the west side of Powow Hill, and the Lake Gardner Town Beach, make up the Powow River Conservation Area, which is permanently protected from development.

The Camp Kent Environmental Center, on the shore of Lake Gardner, was established shortly after the Town purchased the land and it continues to lead the environmental program. The center hosts over a dozen unique events throughout the year. An active summer camp and many school programs are held there as well. To expand the popular programs at the center the old lodge has been renovated to include handicapped access and additional classroom space, and the Adirondack has been modified to provide boat storage space.

The camp is accessible via trails and automobile with parking at Battis Farm. Boats can be taken to Camp Kent from various locations along the Powow River and the Town Beach. Recreation at Camp Kent includes swimming, hiking, biking, boating, and camping.



Landry Stadium

The Town of Amesbury recently renovated Landry Stadium, located on the grounds of the Amesbury Middle School. The Middle School site was the site of the Amesbury High School, which burned in April 7, 1964. Future uses of the venue in addition to concerts are being considered on a case-by-case basis. The open air lighted stadium surrounds a central track and field area, and the recent \$1.8 Million dollar renovation made it fully handicap accessible.



Wetlands and Water Resources

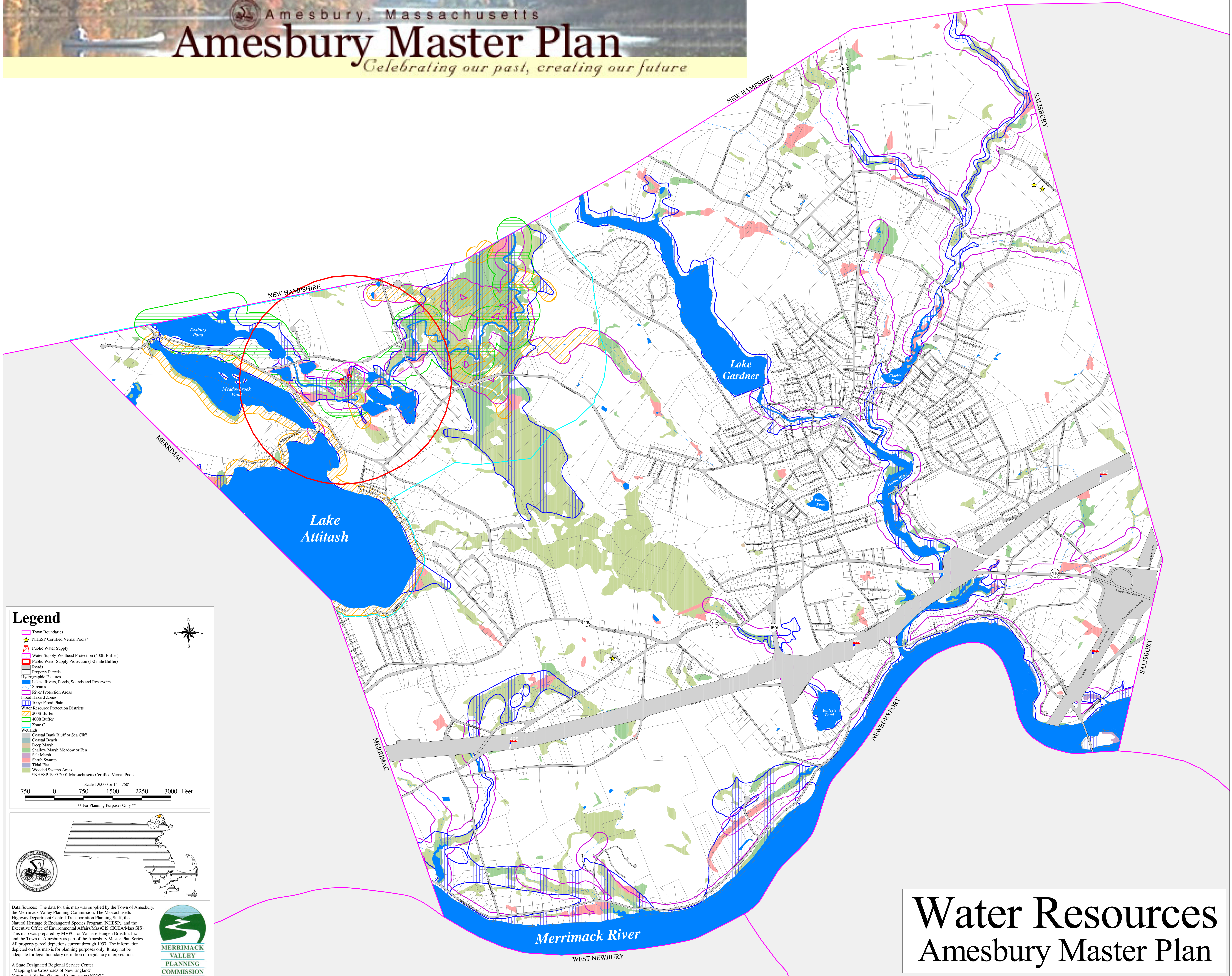
Wetlands are critical resources for groundwater recharge and discharge, flood control, water purification, and sediment retention. They are areas of high biodiversity that provide both environmental services and socio-economic benefits. Wetlands act as biological and mechanical filters, which prevent pollutants from entering lakes, rivers, and groundwater. They provide important habitat for birds, animals, and plants. Wetlands are also important in controlling stormwater. Their flexible storage capacity allows floodwaters to be released slowly, reducing flood damage. The socio-economic benefits include recreational activities related to fish and wildlife such as fishing, hunting, bird watching and photography. Wetlands also provide economic benefit by limiting flood damage.

Amesbury's water resources are shown on the Water Resources Map. Additional information related to the Town's watershed is provided in the Water Resources chapter of this Master Plan. Amesbury's water resources include the Powow and Merrimack Rivers, the Back River, Lake Attitash, Lake Gardner, Tuxbury Pond, and many other tributary's and smaller bodies of water. The largest wetlands are associated with the 500-acre Great Swamp, the Powow River, and the Back River. The Merrimack and Powow Rivers are both influenced by the tide.

Lake Attitash and Lake Gardner are extremely valuable natural and recreational resources for Amesbury. There is limited remaining open space along the shores of Lake Attitash. Grants secured as a result of lakeside development have funded water monitoring, weed control and education programs for Lake Attitash. Lake Gardner has less development on its shores, which can be attributed to the publicly owned Powow River Conservation Area protecting the eastern shore of the Lake. The Lake Gardner Beach is used for boat launching and passive recreation.

The Powow Riverwalk is a pedestrian walkway that follows the former railroad line along the Powow River. Phase II (1.2 miles) of the Riverwalk is completed and Phase I, connecting the path to Downtown, will be completed in 2004. The Riverwalk will be connected to the Merrimack Valley Regional Transit Authority Amesbury Transportation Center once the center is constructed in the Lower Millyard on the Back River (a tributary to the Powow River). Access for the handicapped will need to be developed between the Riverwalk and the transportation center. Amesbury is also considering locating a Historic Transportation Park near the future transportation center and the Riverwalk at the confluence of the Back River and the Powow River.

Amesbury has three Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program Certified Vernal Pools as shown on the Habitat and Ecosystems Map developed for the Master Plan. One is located off of Middle Road in the southwest part of Amesbury, and the other two vernal pools are located off Black River Road in the northeast section of Amesbury.



Legend

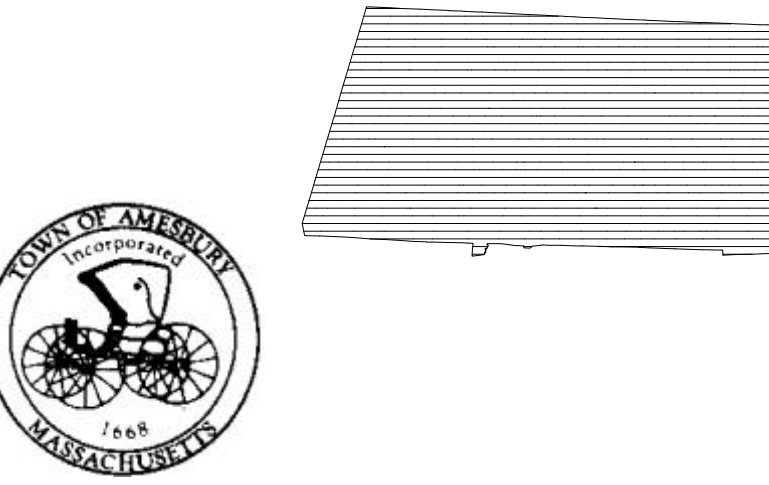
- Town Boundaries
- NHESP Certified Vernal Pools*
- Public Water Supply
- Water Supply-Wellhead Protection (400ft Buffer)
- Public Water Supply Protection (1/2 mile Buffer)
- Roads
- Property Parcels
- Hydrographic Features
 - Lakes, Rivers, Ponds, Sounds and Reservoirs
 - Streams
 - River Protection Areas
 - Flood Hazard Zones
 - 100yr Flood Plain
- Water Resource Protection Districts
 - 200ft Buffer
 - 400ft Buffer
 - Zone C
- Wetlands
 - Coastal Bank Bluff or Sea Cliff
 - Coastal Beach
 - Deep Marsh
 - Shallow Marsh Meadow or Fen
 - Salt Marsh
 - Shrub Swamp
 - Tidal Flat
 - Wooded Swamp Areas

*NHESP 1999-2001 Massachusetts Certified Vernal Pools.

Scale 1:9,000 or 1" = 750'

750 0 750 1500 2250 3000 Feet

** For Planning Purposes Only **



Data Sources: The data for this map was supplied by the Town of Amesbury, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, the Massachusetts Highway Department Central Transportation Planning Staff, the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP), and the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs/MassGIS (EOEA/MassGIS). This map was prepared by MVPC for Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. and the Town of Amesbury as part of the Amesbury Master Plan Series. All property parcel depictions current through 1997. The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. It may not be adequate for legal boundary definition or regulatory interpretation.

A State Designated Regional Service Center
"Mapping the Crossroads of New England"
Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC)
160 Main Street, Haverhill, MA, 01830



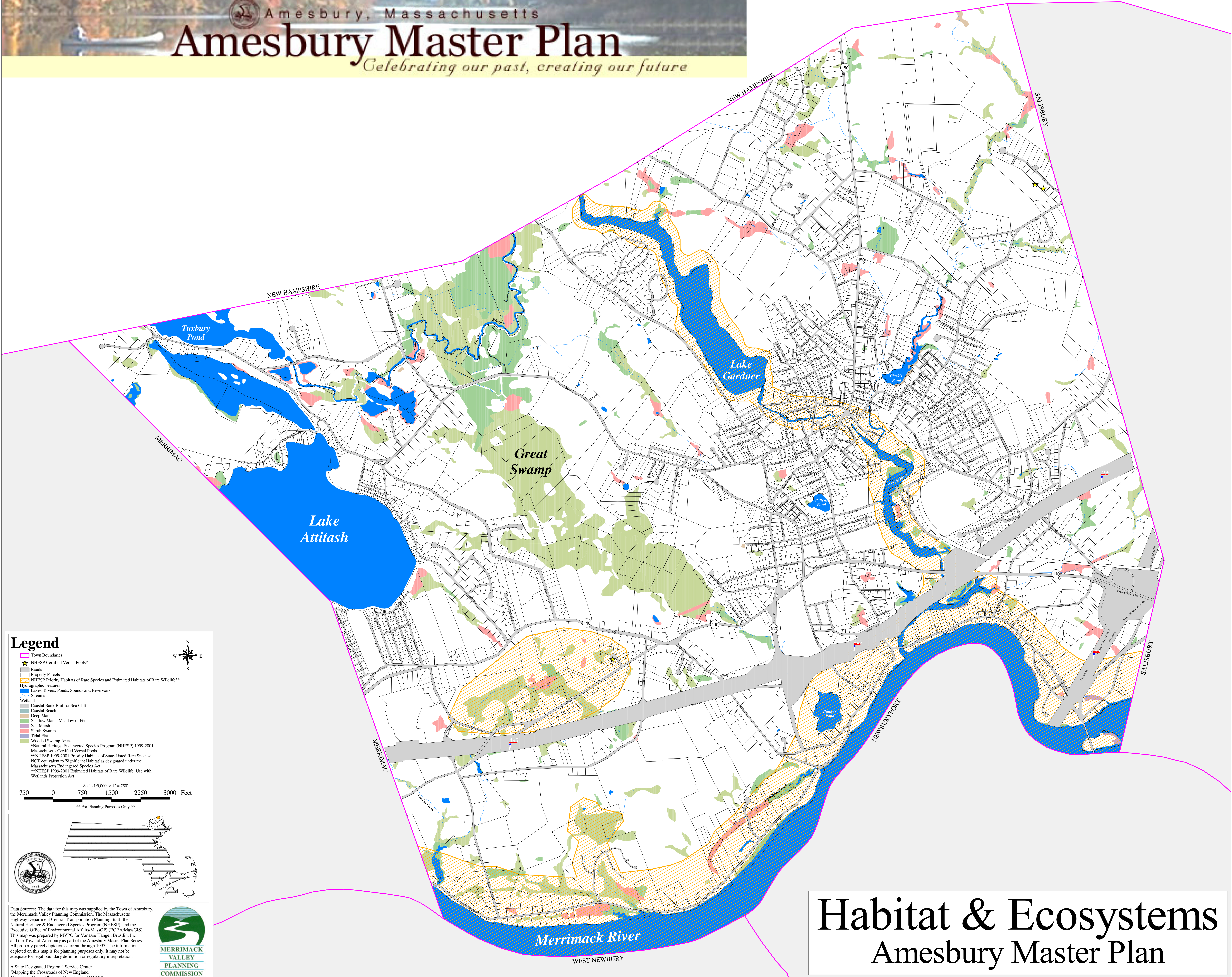
Printed April 15, 2003 JHW/MDF
Revised Feb. 24, 2004 MDP



Wild Water International

Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.

Water Resources Amesbury Master Plan

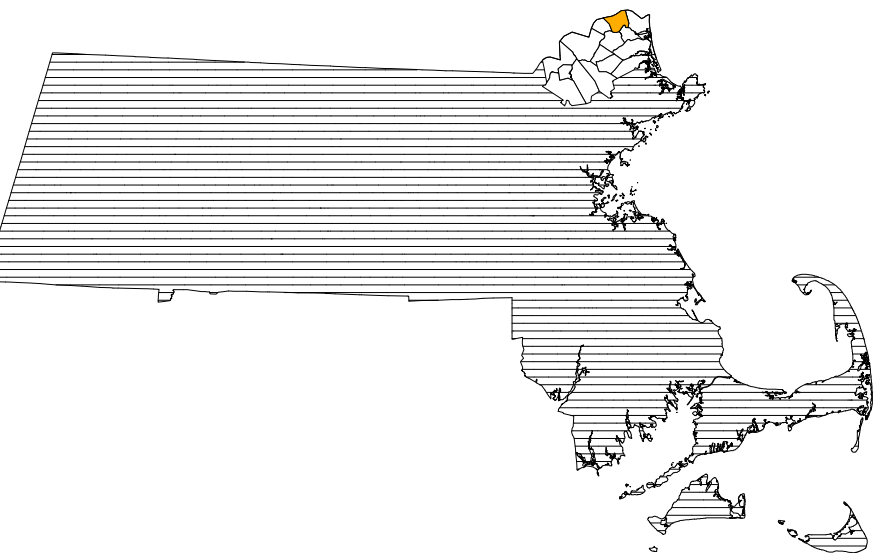




Legend

- Town Boundaries
- NHESP Certified Vernal Pools*
- Roads
- Property Parcels
- NHESP Priority Habitats of Rare Species and Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife**
- Hydrographic Features
 - Lakes, Rivers, Ponds, Sounds and Reservoirs
 - Streams
- Wetlands
 - Coastal Bank Bluff or Sea Cliff
 - Coastal Beach
 - Deep Marsh
 - Shallow Marsh Meadow or Fen
 - Salt Marsh
 - Shrub Swamp
 - Tidal Flat
 - Wooded Swamp Areas

*Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program (NHESP) 1999-2001 Massachusetts Certified Vernal Pools.
**NHESP 1999-2001 Priority Habitats of State-Listed Rare Species: NOT equivalent to "Significant Habitat" as designated under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act
***NHESP 1999-2001 Estimated Habitats of Rare Wildlife: Use with Wetlands Protection Act

Scale 1:9,000 or 1" = 750'
750 0 750 1500 2250 3000 Feet
** For Planning Purposes Only **






MERRIMACK VALLEY PLANNING COMMISSION

Data Sources: The data for this map was supplied by the Town of Amesbury, the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission, The Massachusetts Highway Department Central Transportation Planning Staff, the Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP), and the Executive Office of Environmental Affairs/MassGIS (EOEA/MassGIS). This map was prepared by MVPC for Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. and the Town of Amesbury as part of the Amesbury Master Plan Series. All property parcel depictions current through 1997. The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. It may not be adequate for legal boundary definition or regulatory interpretation.


A State Designated Regional Service Center
"Mapping the Crossroads of New England"
Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC)
160 Main Street, Haverhill MA, 01830

Printed April 15 2003 12:00 PM
Revised Feb. 24 2004 MDJ

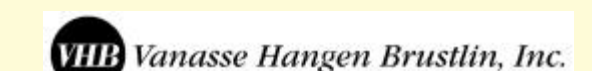
E:\Arcview\Amesbury\018.apr\Habitat&Ecosystems



RKG ASSOCIATES, INC.



Wild Water International



Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc.

Habitat & Ecosystems

Amesbury Master Plan



Wildlife

Much of the information about wildlife in Amesbury comes from regional species lists and habitat descriptions. Large mammals found in the area include white tailed deer and the occasional transient moose or black bear. Small populations of red fox, grey fox, and bobcats are also indigenous to the region. Smaller mammals, such as, cottontail rabbits, raccoon, striped skunk, mink, porcupine, moles, shrews, bats, mice, opossum, squirrel, beaver, and weasel are commonly seen in the area. In New England, the agricultural grassland habitats and the white pine-hemlock-northern hardwood forest have the first and second greatest bird species diversity, respectively. A study in Woodsom Farm's grasslands habitat counted forty-one species in one June day. Camp Kent has been recording bird species since the spring of 2002. Ninety-three species had been identified by the publication of the *OSRP Update*.



Hills

There are six hills in Amesbury that are prominent characteristics in the landscape. Both Mundy and Lone Tree Hills are partially developed, but the remaining hills are largely undeveloped. Powow Hill is the highest point in Amesbury and much of this land is included in the publicly owned Powow River Conservation Area, providing excellent protection to Lake Gardner and flood control for Amesbury. Whittier Hill, Beech Hill, and Ring's Hill are also largely undeveloped and critical for flood protection and water quality.



Scenic Landscapes

Amesbury's development patterns consist of a densely developed core area, with spokes of residential development extending outward along major roadways. Between these spokes of residential development are substantial open space areas consisting of undeveloped and agricultural lands, highlighting the Town's scenic hills and valleys. It is these open space networks that provide the unique landscape that portrays Amesbury's quality of life.

Key scenic landscapes are located throughout Amesbury, both in the downtown and in the surrounding rural areas. The following areas are among the unique and scenic vistas in Amesbury:

- Whitehall Road, views of Woodsom Farm and Lake Gardner;
- Lion's Mouth Road, views of Woodsom Farm;
- Fern Avenue and Market Street, views of Cider Hill Farm and Back's Pond;

- Kimball Road, views of the Town Forest, Lake Attitash, and Tuxbury Pond;
- Pleasant Valley Road and Main Street, views of the Merrimack River;
- Main Street, views of the Point Shore neighborhood historic district;
- South Hampton Road, views of the Powwow River Conservation Area;
- Newton Road, views of the forested areas to the north and south; and
- Downtown Amesbury, the restored Upper Millyard around the falls.

Amesbury's efforts in open space preservation should include a comprehensive inventory of scenic landscapes.



Chapter 61A and Agricultural Preservation Restrictions

There are many active farms and large parcels of agricultural land in Amesbury. Concentrations of agricultural activity are located on Woodman Road, Fern Avenue, Friend Street, upper Market Street, South Hampton Road, and Middle Road.

Chapter 61A of Massachusetts General Law grants farm owners preferential local property tax treatment based on the Farmland Valuation Advisory Commission standards. The municipality receives the right to recover some tax benefits and a right of first refusal to purchase the property. Eligibility criteria include having five acres used for agricultural/horticultural production for at least two years. Amesbury has a fair amount of land protected in Chapter 61A Laws. Beech Hill, between Market Street and Fern Avenue, has a cluster of large parcels covered by Chapter 61A law.

The Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program preserves land from development and promotes active agriculture through a permanent deed restriction. One property, Pender Farm, has been approved for the APR program, and other Amesbury properties have applied for the APR program.

Recreation



Playlots and Neighborhood Parks

Neighborhood parks and playlots provide protected recreational areas for children, locations for community gatherings, and sitting areas for reading a book or eating lunch. The high-density residential areas in Amesbury do not provide adequate outdoor playing space for small children. According to open space standards, Amesbury would benefit from another four acres of playlots downtown to provide protected sites for children to play. The standards also indicate that Amesbury needs

an additional 10 acres of neighborhood parks and playgrounds for children ages 5 to 16 years old.

Additional land for playlots and neighborhood parks can be found adjacent to schools and on vacant lots in the downtown area. Playground equipment can be obtained and constructed inexpensively with the use of jungle gyms, swings, and sand boxes.



Playfields

Amesbury has approximately 112 acres of playfields for active recreation. Young adults and adults use the fields for organized games and practices. Open space standards indicate that 112 acres should be sufficient for Amesbury (based on the year 2000 population), although as discussed in the Woodsom Farm Section, the Woodsom Farm Committee's recommendation to the Amesbury Municipal Council concluded that additional playfields will be necessary to meet the needs of the citizens in the near future. Four playfields (three rectangular and one diamond) are currently being considered at Woodsom Farm.

Additional fields on private parcels may become available to Amesbury's schools and athletic teams. The Harbor School, which is located near the Amesbury Middle School, is constructing a rectangular field and a baseball/softball diamond. Amesbury is pursuing a contract with the Harbor School to obtain use of the fields for recreational activities. Additional soccer fields have been constructed on a private parcel along Hunt Road adjacent to the TerraSphere Project. It is likely that Amesbury's citizens could contract access to these fields for organized athletics. The Town of Amesbury is current negotiating for use of these fields.



Recreation Programs

Summer recreation for youth includes the Preschool Program, the Youth Park Program, the Teen Program, the Summer Theater Arts Recreation (STAR) Program, and the Summer Environmental Program at Camp Kent. NFL Flag Football, Tennis, and Golf are also offered for Amesbury's youth. Lake Gardner Beach is open for swimming and recreation during the summer months with lifeguards on duty.

The After School Program is held at the Amesbury Elementary School and Cashman Elementary School during the school year. This programs offers assistance with homework, sports, computers, reading programs, arts and crafts, etc. The Youth Ecology Series, which is held at Camp Kent, is also a part of the After School Program. The Theater Arts Program is held at the Amesbury Playhouse Theater three times annually. This program teaches its students about a variety of theatrical subjects.



Handicapped Access

Amesbury has made strides in improving accessibility and usefulness for the elderly and handicapped. The Cashman School completed a fully handicap accessible playground in 2001. Facilities for people with mobility impairments are located at the Collins Street Park, the Middle School stadium facility, the skate park and tot-lot at the Town Park, parts of Woodsom Farm and the Powow River Conservation District, and most of the small parks.

A major effort is still needed to make Amesbury's parks more accessible to the handicapped and elderly residents. Handicapped accessibility needs to be improved at the Camp Kent Environmental Center, Woodsom Farm, and other recreational facilities. The High School's recreational facilities are not handicap accessible.

Open Space and Resource Protection Plan Update

The *OSRP Update* developed the following planning goals for the years 2002 through 2006:

- Preserve and protect public ground and surface water supply;
- Create educational connections between all citizens and environmental resources;
- Protect the unique landscape features such as hilltops and shorelines from development;
- Develop bike and hiking trails along our waterways and open space;
- Provide public access to town open space lands and waterways;
- Improve passive and active recreational opportunities on town land;
- Provide recreational opportunities for elderly and mobility-impaired residents;
- Identify and control non-point pollution sources along the Powow River watershed;
- Develop a formal policy on conservation protection measures; and
- Develop greenways linking Amesbury with regional open spaces.



Five Year Action Plan

The following Five Year Action Plan summarizes the priorities for Open Space and Recreation for the years 2002 through 2006:

- Update goals for the Open Space and Recreation Plan within the Town's Master Plan;
- Adopt a formal policy on the preservation of community open space;
- Develop a program of public awareness and education towards the needs and benefits of conservation & preservation of open space;
- Adopt an urban street tree plan for the R-8 District;
- Assess the extent of environmental contamination on all town owned property;
- Improve handicapped access to all Town recreation areas;
- Develop an urban recreational park on Powow Hill;
- Develop a Riverwalk & bikeway between downtown & Route 110;
- Develop additional multipurpose fields;
- Enhance Woodsom Farm for recreational& conservation needs;
- Assist in local initiatives to develop a permanent site for the Carriage Museum;
- Provide public access to lakes & ponds;
- Improve & maintain local areas of scenic beauty;
- Coordinate with regional communities to plan a bicycle route along the Merrimack River to Newburyport & Merrimac; and
- Determine the feasibility to develop a youth center.

Community Identified Assets and Liabilities

As part of the process to develop a Master Plan for the Town of Amesbury, Massachusetts, members of the Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, Inc. (VHB) consultant team sought input from Amesbury community members on their issues, concerns and visions for the City. The process of identifying Amesbury's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats consisted of a series of focused interviews and public meetings to gain insight on elements that should be addressed in the Master Plan. These meetings included the following:

January 16 and 17, 2003	Interviews (over 100 people)
March 1, 2003	Public Open House on Assets and Liabilities (over 125 attendees)

March 22, 2003

Public Design workshop on Visioning (over 75 attendees)

The information compiled during the interviews and input received during the public meetings has been supplemented by the results of the 2002 Citizen Survey and with observations made by the consultant team during site visits. Additional input was received from the Master Plan Steering Committee, the seven Focus Groups for each of the Master Plan Elements and staff from the Office of Community and Economic Development.

The following sections provide a summary of what members of the Amesbury community have stated as being the Town's assets and liabilities. The statements reflect individual comments and viewpoints, and may or may not have factual basis.



Assets

- Amesbury is rich in its natural resources, with amenities that include Lake Attitash and Lake Gardener, several ponds, a public beach, the Merrimack and Powow Rivers, open space preserves, parks, farms and the Town Forest.
- The Powwow and Merrimack Rivers are valuable assets that contribute to the scenic qualities of Amesbury and its recreational lifestyle. There is a great potential for contiguous access to the watershed through enhanced pedestrian and bicycle connections and boating facilities.
- Amesbury has as a number of parks and open spaces that provide year round active and passive recreation activities. Residents value the many beautiful open spaces and vistas throughout the City.
- Amesbury has a rich and unique historical and architectural heritage that defines the community and should be better preserved and recognized. The many historic older buildings in the Downtown area are significant attributes to build upon for the City's revitalization strategies.
- Amesbury has active historic groups and unique museums to help improve the awareness of the community's rich history and resources. The Carriage Museum is viewed as an important aspect to signify the roots of Amesbury life when it was founded.
- The local artisan community could be an important resource to improve recognition of Amesbury's historic and cultural resources.



Liabilities

- There is a need to balance the amount of development with preservation of open space areas. Residential growth is threatening the rural character of Amesbury, and the Conservation Commission has been faced with issues of new development on environmentally sensitive areas. There are concerns about the potential for Chapter 40B development on larger properties and the impacts that it will have for lost open space and demand for City infrastructure and services.
- Preserving open space is a high priority for many in the community, and there are concerns about the possibility of selling open space lands to help pay for City services and improvements. There is a need to identify and prioritize areas for protection and to explore creative and proactive solutions (i.e. partnerships, obtaining conservation easements, exploring implementation of the Community Preservation Act) to acquire more open space areas.
- Amesbury residents would like to see more recreational facilities, including open space Downtown, playgrounds, soccer fields, skating rinks, performance space, a teen center, aquatics (indoor and outdoor), boat access to the lakes and rivers and bicycle and pedestrian trails. There is a need to identify creative solutions for funding to provide these amenities.
- There is a need for better connectivity between open space areas and between neighborhoods and the Village Center. Better linkages between these areas is needed for pedestrian and bicycle connections.
- As evidenced in the lack of consensus about the future of Woodsom Farm, there is an unresolved debate in the community regarding maintaining a balance between preservation of open space and providing additional recreational amenities.
- The increased use of open space means increased maintenance, resulting in increased costs. There are concerns that motorized vehicles are ruining trails, and that parks and open space areas are prone to vandalism and debris.
- There is a need for better awareness in the community about recreation and open space amenities in Amesbury. In addition to better marketing of these resources, promotion of amenities should include providing better access and parking. More public awareness is needed about the cost and benefits of open space in the City, including use of ecotourism as an economic development strategy.
- The Watershed Protection District needs better delineation and creates limitations on buildable properties; construction is permitted above but not below the district. There are problems with septic systems and associated recharge within the watershed protection area. Watershed area regulations may

need additional “teeth.”

- Amesbury’s cultural resources are presently underutilized. There is a desire to bring greater awareness to Amesbury residents and the surrounding communities about the importance of the historic and cultural significance of the City’s heritage.
- The City’s bylaws regarding preservation and alteration of historic buildings and properties are viewed as not being strong enough. There are concerns that not enough programs or incentives are available to promote awareness of the importance of Amesbury’s historic sites. Additional funding mechanisms are needed to support and sustain cultural and natural resources in Amesbury.

There is a sentiment that there is no strong central resource for promoting or providing information about cultural activities and resources. There are many different groups involved in historic and cultural preservation, but not a lot of coordination among their activities.

Natural Resources Recommendations

The following sections outline the work of the Master Plan Steering Committee and the Natural Resources Focus Group to develop recommendations to guide future resource protection initiatives in the Town of Amesbury over the next 20 years.



Natural Resources Vision

The Natural Resources Focus Group developed the following Vision Statement to guide their efforts to develop recommendations:

**Preserve and Protect the Open Spaces and
Natural Resources that Define Amesbury’s
Quality of Life.**

Preservation and protection of open space and natural resources is a high priority for Amesbury residents. The unique geographic and natural features of Amesbury-- the river-fronts, wildlife areas, access to lakes and ponds, scenic hills, and farmlands— contributes significantly to its quality of life. We highly value the recreational and conservation amenities that are found in our community and we will strive to protect sensitive ecological and agricultural resource areas from development. We will provide high quality recreational and educational facilities that support access to and appreciation of natural resources.



Goals, Strategies and Actions

NR-1	Protect existing natural features in all new development.
NR-1.1	Develop zoning requirements that ensure new development will blend carefully with existing natural features.
	➤ Update town by-laws to ensure sustainable development practices with lesser impacts to the environment; give consideration to incentives for new development that is Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) Certified to promote state of the art strategies for sustainable site development, water savings, energy efficiency, materials selection and environmental quality.
	➤ Develop requirements for developers to pay impact fees towards schools for new residential development.
	➤ Develop a tree and/or existing landscape preservation ordinance to protect mature trees, including fees for removal of mature trees during large-scale development, to encourage preservation of existing landscapes to the greatest extent possible.
	➤ Require developers to dedicate open space in exchange for developing on or near environmentally sensitive areas.
	➤ Ensure that new residential subdivisions include dedication of land, or a fee in lieu, for public parks and open space areas.
	➤ Encourage the use of native plant species with low water and fertilization requirements for commercial development and new home subdivision landscaping.
	➤ Consider requirements for testing soils characteristics to determine land use suitability.
	➤ Post Open Space/Greenways/Water Resources/ Wetlands/Endangered Species maps in public meeting areas for Town Council, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals and the ConCom to review when evaluating land use proposals.
	➤ Develop informational materials to include as part of the Design Review process to inform developers about the importance of maintaining open space, environmentally sensitive areas and trails to maintain the desired quality of life in Amesbury.
	➤ Develop more stringent regulations for septic system development on small and 'marginal' lots.

NR-2	Preserve and enhance open space and natural resources.
NR-2.1	Explore new avenues to ensure that larger tracts of open space and other natural environments are preserved and maintained.
	➤ Update the Open Space and Recreation Plan, and adopt a formal policy on the preservation and maintenance of community open space.
	➤ Prioritize, improve, and maintain areas of greatest sensitivity/beauty.
	➤ Create an Amesbury Greenbelt and focus on preserving parcels to connect and encourage development of greenways.
	➤ Prioritize areas for Town acquisition and work with property owners to develop a first right of refusal for future land transactions.
	➤ Provide awareness and solicit community support for institution of the Community Preservation Act, including surveying other MA communities for successes, to provide resources for acquisition of key properties and for protection of properties with significant environmental or cultural resources.
	➤ Explore the feasibility of developing a local Land Trust, or a cooperative effort with regional affiliations, to actively pursue and monitor land conservation efforts.
	➤ Support a town-wide inventory of flora and fauna to determine most sensitive areas ecologically as well as to protect known wildlife corridors.
	➤ Develop a program of public awareness and education towards the needs and benefits of conservation and preservation of open space and explore feasibility of implementation.

NR-2	Preserve and enhance open space and natural resources.
	➤ Enhance Woodsom Farm for recreational and preservation purposes.
	➤ Preserve wildlife areas through Town land acquisitions or other appropriate land dedications, and include designated wildlife viewing areas on trail maps.
NR-2.2	Develop programs to enhance existing areas of natural resources and promote environmental protection.
	➤ Develop programs to work with and encourage school students to maintain trails and open space areas.
	➤ Create a position for a School Garden Representative to establish native plant gardens at the schools using native plants rescued from new development.
	➤ Adopt a formal policy on municipal pesticide reduction.
	➤ Adopt an urban street tree plan for the R-8 District.
	➤ Encourage use of environmentally sustainable building materials and supplies to be used in school construction and town offices.
	➤ Require school buses to use non-polluting fuels.

NR-3	Create greater public awareness about the natural resources, open spaces and recreational amenities in Amesbury.
NR-3.1	Promote activities that create an awareness of the benefits found in Amesbury's natural resources.
	➤ Develop methods to promote ecotourism based upon the valuable natural resources available in Town (kayak rentals, dory rides from Lowell's Boat Shop to downtown, carriage rides through town, kayaking up Powow River from Camp Kent/Lake Gardner, mountain biking through Woodsom, Town Forest, etc.).
	➤ Research and apply for grants to create an eco-circuit, either private or town-operated.
	➤ Create a brochure of trails, parks, waterways and recreational facilities and the natural resource amenities found at Camp Kent, including year round programs and activities, use of dories, youth and family programs and trails through the Powow Conservation Area.
	➤ Develop a visitor's center with kiosk and other information about natural resource and open space amenities in Town.
	➤ Develop innovative signage for all town open space trails, including those developed as part of cluster subdivisions.
NR-3.2	Develop actions to improve recreational opportunities.
	➤ Research funding mechanisms to reuse a mill building to create a Teen Center.
	➤ Develop an inventory of deficiencies and improve handicapped access to all town recreation areas.
	➤ Develop an urban recreational park on Powow Hill.
	➤ Identify areas to provide increased public access to rivers, lakes and ponds.
	➤ Determine the feasibility of developing a YMCA or a Town Pool.
	➤ Create transportation hub historical park in the Downtown/Lower Millyard.